

VZCZCXRO7026
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSK #0031/01 0121219
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 121219Z JAN 07 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5515
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000031

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION SITREP 4: FAMILIAR THEMES CHARACTERIZE
LOCAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN BREST

REF: MINSK 019

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

11. (C) Despite claims from authorities in Brest that the local election process is proceeding smoothly, opposition political party leaders confirmed that the GOB unabashedly continues to employ the full arsenal of administrative resources at its disposal to influence the electoral process. Party representatives agreed that there is significant value added in using the framework of the elections to spread the opposition message, notwithstanding the elections' inevitable outcome. End summary.

Denials and Pressure Mar Registration

12. (C) During Emboffs' trip to the southwestern city of Brest on January 10, local opposition activists asserted that local election commissions maximized opportunities presented by the Electoral Code to eliminate opposition candidates at every stage of the electoral process. Igor Maslovskiy, Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" (BSDP) candidate for the Brest City and Oblast Councils, pointed out that 30 percent of BSDP candidates were denied registration of initiative groups for signature collection, an obstacle not encountered during the 2003 local elections. Representatives of the Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) -- whose candidates in Brest withdrew in the past week in a coordinated protest -- reported widespread cases in which employers pressured registered candidates to withdraw, directly or by targeting their family members.

13. (C) Brest City Election Commission Chairman Vasily Snitko stressed to Emboffs that his commission registered 72 candidates, including 25 pro-government and opposition political party representatives, for the 40 seats in the Brest City Council. However, Snitko admitted that the commission denied registration to 26.5 percent of nominated candidates, in most cases for errors in the candidates' mandatory tax declarations.

Unequal Campaigning Conditions and Limited Voter Access

14. (C) In sharp contrast to assurances from representatives of the local government and election commission that all candidates, regardless of political persuasion, enjoyed equal conditions for campaigning, opposition candidates painted a much dimmer picture.

15. (C) Yuras Gubarevich, a Belarusian Popular Front (BPF)

leader in the Brest oblast and a local council candidate, recounted difficulties experienced by opposition candidates in printing campaign materials. Whereas state-owned presses artificially delayed the release of low-quality materials, in some cases filled with errors, privately owned printing houses simply refused outright to accept orders from the opposition, citing a desire to avoid licensing or other problems from the GOB.

¶6. (C) Stepan Novoselchan, United Civic Party (UCP) Brest Oblast Chairman and candidate, criticized the local authorities for ambivalence towards the elections and the election commissions for inertness in providing candidates with assistance foreseen by the Electoral Code. He expressed frustration with insufficient opportunities to meet with his voters and to distribute campaign materials. He also echoed the sentiments of his colleagues in other regions regarding the inadequacy of the radio spots allotted each candidate (reftel). In addition to airing during non-peak listening hours, radio spots in the Brest oblast are broadcast on an antiquated system that does not reach most of the population.

Silver Lining - Party Cooperation and Voter Interaction

¶7. (C) Despite a common belief that the local elections will serve only to highlight the undemocratic nature of the GOB regime, Brest opposition party representatives concurred that participation in the elections has been a helpful exercise at both the local and national level. UCP Brest Oblast Head Novoselchan praised the opportunity presented by the local elections to interact with voters within a legal framework. He expressed regret that the parties were not able to agree upon a common platform or campaign slogan for

MINSK 00000031 002 OF 002

their candidates, but spoke positively of the level of cooperation exhibited in ensuring that democratic candidates did not contest the same seat, thereby making the most of limited resources.

Comment

¶8. (C) The latest pre-election monitoring trip confirmed that the circumstances in which local elections will occur in Brest mirror the discouraging situation across the country. Discussions with the local authorities and opposition party candidates -- as always under the eagle eye of the security services and press -- highlighted the complete disconnect between how the GOB and the democratic opposition perceive the playing field. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that opposition activists continue to embrace the value of participating in the elections as a chance to inform and interact with the public.

Stewart